

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 227 887

JC 820 460

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TITLE Private Junior College Students: A Profile.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Role; *Community Colleges; Comparative Analysis; Females; Institutional Evaluation; *Private Colleges; *Single Sex Colleges; Social Values; *Student Attitudes; Student Attrition; Student Educational Objectives; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students

IDENTIFIERS *Harcum Junior College PA

ABSTRACT

Drawing largely from institutional research prepared at Harcum Junior College (HJC), a private all-female two-year college in Pennsylvania, this report contrasts private junior college students with community college students in terms of their attitudes and values, reasons for attending college, rates of and reasons for attrition, and evaluations of their colleges and programs. First, an overview is provided of the types of two-year colleges and the number of students enrolled in private schools as compared to public colleges. Next, a comparison of attitudes reveals less interest in vocational goals and higher levels of conservatism among private college students. Next, findings from studies of the values of HJC students and public college students are compared, revealing the consistencies in the values of the two groups. Then, the results of three studies are presented, showing the differences in the reasons for attending college of HJC students in 1968; State University of New York, Buffalo, students in 1973; and HJC students in 1978. The following section examines attrition rates and causes at HJC and other public and private two-year colleges in various size and status categories. After comparing the assessments by HJC students of the college with the college evaluations of community college students in New Jersey and Harrisburg Community College in Pennsylvania, the paper discusses the social roles of private and public colleges and the similarities of their students. (HB)

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PRIVATE JUNIOR COLLEGE STUDENTS:
A PROFILE

by

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PRIVATE JUNIOR COLLEGE STUDENTS:
A PROFILE

According to data developed from a series of comparative studies, in some dimensions they differ from their public, community college counterparts. However, private junior college students often resemble them.

OVERVIEW

As has been noted (Cohen & Brawer; 1982)

"Two generic names have been applied to two-year colleges. From their beginnings until the 1940s they were known most commonly as junior colleges. During the 1950s and 1960s, the term junior college was applied more often to the lower-division branches of private universities and to two-year colleges supported by churches or organized independently, while community colleges came gradually to be used for the comprehensive, publically-supported institutions. By the 1970s, the term community college was usually applied to both types.

"Junior colleges were widespread in their early years. Koos reported 20 in 1909 and 170 ten years later. By 1922.... of the 207 institutions operating in that year, 137 were privately supported. By 1940 there were 610 colleges, still small, averaging about 400 students each.

"The high point for private junior colleges came in 1949, when there were 322 privately controlled two-year colleges, 180 of them affiliated with churches, 108 independent nonprofit, and 34 propriety they then began a steady decline. By 1980 the median private junior college had fewer than 500 students, only three had more than 5000." (pp 4,5,9)

In the 1980s, of the total undergraduate students in the United States, some 50% are enrolled in two-year colleges. Of this number, less than 15% attend private-independent or church-related two year colleges which, combined, now comprise less than 15% of the grand total of approximately 1230 community, junior, and technical colleges in the United States and its territories.

Not a great deal is known about the students attending the non-public, non-tax-supported two-year colleges. What, for example, are their values? Do they share the aspirations of students attending public, community colleges?

In what ways are they similar; dissimilar to those students residing mainly at home and attending a college in their local community or close by?

ATTITUDES

During the past decade, the American Council on Education, reporting on the attitudes of college freshmen noted both differences and similarities among public (community) and private (junior) colleges. For example:

1- Freshmen in both types expressed more conservatism on social issues and greater concern about academic studies than their predecessors.

2- Almost half of the total freshmen group identified themselves as middle-of-the-road politically. Private-sector freshmen opted for conservatism 19.7% of the time; public-college freshmen only 15.3%.

3- This private-sector differential remained consistently more conservative in regard to attitudes relating to school desegregation; married women's family responsibilities; open admission college policies; the legalization of marihuana; student protests; and the Protestant ethic.

4- The private college respondents expressed less interest in vocational-economic goals of education than did the community college respondents.

5- A substantial majority of both student populations expressed the belief that the chief benefit of college is monetary; the higher percentage being among the community college students: (63.6% vs 71.8%)

6- In general, on such social issues and concerns as pollution control; consumer protection; birth control; job equality for women - expressed differences between the two groups were insignificant.

7- In terms of expressed personal preferences, both groups indicated by their responses a high regard for such experiences as artistic performance; family relationships; environmental issues; friends; developing a philosophy of life.

VALUES

For private two-year college students who expressed stronger conservatism than community college students, what of their value and belief systems? Hadden (1969) suggested that young Americans are caught up in what he describes as a "cult of privatism". Additionally, Brawer (1971) noted:

As long ago as 1955, Gillespie and Allport (1955) compared attitudes and values of American students with those of foreign students. The characteristics that most sharply distinguished American students from the college population in other countries were the accent on privatism, the inclination to seek a rich and full life for oneself and one's family, lack of concern about social problems, and emphasis on thinking about material benefits in practical and concrete terms. (p.7)

A private, independent two-year college for women, located in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania - Harcum Junior College - conducted in 1970 one of the few studies relating to attitudes about privatism. (Blai: 1970) A comparison was made between the views expressed by a sample of 2000 college seniors (Hadden, 1969) and the students at Harcum. Although some minor differences were noted, the extensive degree of congruence between the Harcum and Hadden respondents clearly suggested that Hadden's conclusions about the marked extent of privatism sentiments were equally applicable to women students enrolled in a private two-year college.

Additionally, a values pattern of similarities was noted between students at Harcum (women) and students in three California community colleges responding to Rokeach's (1969) lists of "instrumental" and "terminal" values. Among 427 Harcum students (Blai, 1973) and 1487 California community college students, (Brawer, 1971), both groups ranked Honest; Loving; Responsible traits as being of highest value to them. Both also placed Obedience last and included Courageous and Polite among the five least-valued characteristics.

Among Rokeach's "terminal" values, which he identifies as representing.... "desired end-states of existence", there was close agreement between the private-

junior and public-community college student samples. Within the top-seven selections of both groups, they chose the same value - Happiness; Mature Love; Freedom; Comfortable Life; Self-respect; Family security; World at peace. There were some rank-ordering differences but these were minor. Further evidence of consistency was revealed among their least-valued choices, each indicating the following to be among their four least-valued: Sense of accomplishment; Salvation; Social recognition.

WHY ATTEND COLLEGE?

What motivates students to attend private two-year colleges? A 'clue' is suggested in the results of a questionnaire survey among 639 Harcum Junior College students (all women) in 1978. Also included in the following tabulation are the views expressed by a sample of 837 freshmen students attending the State University of New York at Buffalo: (Ameele & Jones, 1973). The ¹⁹⁷⁸rank-order listing, based on frequency of selection, are itemized in descending order of "importance" for the Harcum sample. The SUNY, Buffalo rankings appear in parentheses; following the Reason listed.

During the past 15 years, it has been increasingly evident to college administrators; faculty; guidance counselors - that greater numbers of students are viewing their college education as a means for acquiring some direct material gain in the future. All of the following facts appear to suggest that college years are viewed by many students not so much as a means for becoming a more concerned and knowledgeable citizen; (i.e., becoming 'better educated'), but rather as a means for acquiring a better position (materially) in life; a 'good' job; a higher salary; prestige; power, etc. These are the facts:

- 1- strong emphasis on course grades, shared by students and faculty.
- 2- fierce competition for admission to graduate school.
- 3- increasing clamor that courses be geared to the 'practical' life situations rather than to the cultural (i.e. liberal arts) enrichment of the individual.

In 1968 Harcum students were invited to respond, anonymously, to a brief questionnaire requesting them to check off each listed item which they considered to be a valid reason for college attendance. Based on frequency of selection, these are the rankings shown under the 1968 year column for the 530 who responded

Reasons for College Attendance

1978	Reason	1968
1st.	Learn more things of interest (2)	2nd.
2nd.	Prepare for an occupation (1)	1st.
3rd.	Be able to earn more money (5)	6th.
4th.	Meet interesting people (7)	12th.
5th.	Become more cultured (8)	11th.
6th.	Gain a general education (4)	5th.
7th.	Parents want me to go (10)	9th.
8th.	Improve my social life (6)	3rd.
9th.	Improve reading & study skills (9)	13th.
10th.	Be able to contribute more to society (3)	4th.
11th.	There was nothing better to do (11)	14th.
	A- Achieve success & status	7th.
	B- Develop spiritually	8th.
	C- Prepare to transfer to 4-year college	10th.

The above tabulation reveals that:

In 1978

- a) "Be able to earn more money" increased: (effects of inflation?)
- b) "Meet interesting people" increased (less Hadden "privatism; more other-people oriented?)
- c) "Become more cultured" increased: (?)
- d) "Gain a general education" decreased: (not consistent with c) above)
- e) "Parents want me to go" increased: (?)
- f) "Improve my social life" decreased, dramatically: (perhaps the time-honored folkwisdom that young women "go off to college to find a husband" is approaching dodo (i.e. extinct!) status)
- g) "I love reading & study skills" increased: (did the 1978 sample feel 'poorly' prepared in high school to read and study?)
- h) "Be able to contribute more to society" decreased; dramatically (more Hadden "privatism"; more self-centered ?)

Additional facts revealed:

- 1- Despite differences in sex composition, both the SUNY and Harcum samples selected the same two top-ranked items. (Both in 1968 and 1978, the percentages of Harcum respondents selecting each of the 2 top-ranked items was 90% or higher! Learning for the sake of learning and vocational preparation were two very consistent strong motivators for attending college.)
- 2- "Prepare for an occupation" for both SUNY and Harcum students in 1968 was

1st. ranked. It 'slipped' to 2nd. rank in 1978 for the Harcum respondents. For these Harcum students, both in '68 and '78, an overwhelming majority placed very high priority upon vocational preparation. (They did, however, couple this with an almost equal degree of frequency of selection for the non-vocational motive of "learn more things of interest"). This major utilitarian thrust of their selections undoubtedly reflects the emphasis at Harcum of 'terminal' programs; i.e., preparation for immediate employment upon successful graduation. (On the average, approximately half of all Harcum graduates enter immediate employment upon graduation; this vocational-orientation being one of the major missions of the college.)

3- Beyond the 2 top-ranked items, a very wide range of Harcum ranking differences is noted among the other forced-choice items. In these two decade-rankings, these ranged from a small, one-rank difference (i.e. "Gain a general education") to a large, eight-rank difference ("Meet interesting people"). These are summarized below:

A rank-order difference of 1	= 1 item.
2	= 1 item.
3	= 2 items.
4	= 1 item.
5	= 1 item.
6	= 2 items.
7	= 1 item.

Despite the fact that women now comprise about 50% of the national labor force, the fact remains that they are in the labor market a shorter span of years than is the average male worker. As women - they are still deeply committed to their multiple roles in our society of homemaker; wife; mother. Because of the 'people-oriented' roles in which women function, they are probably more keenly aware of the sensible place that paid work should occupy in the total life-activities of the individual. For as psychologist Allan Fromme clearly noted, work can be a two-edged sword. His views:

The fact is, work is good for us. It demands activity, concentration, effort. It creates contest and drama and keeps us in a constant relationship with people. Once we quit, it's gone. We have to create it.

So much for the plusses of work. On the minus side are the sheer quantity of work and the subtle changes it makes in our personalities. WITHOUT REALIZING IT, WE OVERDO IT. It's part of the work ethic of our society. We've been mised to believe that work is not only good for us but ennobling, so that the harder we work, the more righteous we feel. Even the pressures, irritations, and disappointments add to our sense of self-righteousness.

It's too bad we worship this false idol; that we glorify our jobs more than our personal lives. ("50 plus" magazine, March 1982; p.47)

Psychologist Fromme notwithstanding, "Preparation for an occupation" is ranked top-priority among a broad range of utilitarian; spiritual; intellectual; socially-oriented motives for attending college. At least so say both male and female collegians attending two-year colleges.

STUDENT ATTRITION

"The sensitivity of students to the value system of a society that condones dropping out is hinted at, even if half-facetiously, in the remark of one student: "If you quit school after your bachelor's degree, you're a dropout."

(Cohen ' Brawer: 1970, p.13)

Student attrition is not a sterile statistic. Collectively, dropouts reflect the extinguished hopes of young people abruptly deprived of higher education's potential opportunities and advantages. The science of probability (i.e. statistically relevant information) gives mathematical expression to our ignorance, not to our wisdom:(the only 'remedy' is hindsight, for hindsight is the exact science!)

If everything - literally everything - were known about a given phenomenon, for example - college dropouts, statistical estimates about it would be unnecessary. But until the "everything era" is reached - if ever - statistical inference is the next best thing in sight. Where there is sufficient evidence having objective validity, coupled with judicious, conscientious effort to improve existing procedures or practices - prediction can be a worthwhile tool. It can be used to try to determine how many; the reasons; the personality characteristics; and the views of those students who become dropout statistics.

In a Harcum Junior College institutional research report, (Blai; 1969,p.2) it was noted:

For a college, its retention rate, (defined as the percentage of entering freshmen who graduate on schedule with their respective classes), is more than a simple statistic. Loss of students is a costly phenomenon for the college, even though some of those 'lost' do transfer on to other colleges and complete baccalaureate degree programs.

Considering the amount of time, energy and money spent in the recruitment-

admissions process, the problem of attrition in each class prior to graduation cannot be brushed aside. And - since a 'low' student retention rate may have implications for institutional actions, in such areas as curriculum design; admissions standards and procedures; student-faculty relations - this vital statistic reflects a state of affairs which is important on both academic and 'economic' grounds.

Considering the 'cost' of attrition to the college, a careful examination of the scope; the nature; and the general efficacy of the counseling and advisory services, (i.e., personal counseling; academic advising), as it relates to the student withdrawal phenomenon, appears pragmatically worthwhile. The problem faced by students in meeting the academic; social; cultural pressures which are characteristic of college life in a selective, residential college, and the extent to which students succeed in responding to these pressures, unquestionably affects their adjustment. Additionally - it may result in their becoming a dropout statistic."

In another in-house institutional research report, (Blai; 1971, pp. 2,3) it was noted:

The holding power of a junior college is one of the significant indices of its effectiveness. Through an analysis of four types of indicative records, it was ascertained that some 83% of those students who withdrew during the academic year were 'flagged' by being among one of the following four groups:

- 1) first year students requesting a transcript be sent to another college.
- 2) those in potential jeopardy, academically, as revealed by their mid-term record of very low and/or failing grades.
- 3) those earning Incomplete mid-term grades.
- 4) all provisionally-accepted freshmen.

A program of dropout-avoidance counseling was established in academic 1970-71. This focused upon 'prime' dropout candidates, (i.e. those identified as 1) through 4) above)..... During academic 1970-71, the student withdrawal rate was 6% - expressed as a percentage of the total student body at the beginning of the academic year. This compared most favorably with the 11% rate for academic 1969-70. The substantial and sustained improvement in the student attrition rate is associated with the introduction of an expanded counseling-interviewing program deliberately designed to pinpoint, and whenever possible, 'salvage' a potential dropout."

In another study, (Blai; 1971: Scientia etc.) replies from 60 two-year colleges revealed statistically significant differences (at the .05 level of significance) in student first-to-second year retention rates. These favored:

- 1- Private, independent as compared with private, church-related: 76% vs 71%.
- 2- All-female schools, which were greater than co-ed schools: 81% vs 72%.

3- Enrollments; as follows:

- a) up-to-250; significantly greater than 250/500 (84% vs 68%) and 500/750 range of enrollments (84% vs 74%).
- b) those in the 500/750 range; significantly greater than the 750/1000 range (78% vs 48%) and over 1000 (78% vs 70%).

Listed in descending order of retention rates, average rates were:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1- enrollments up to 250 = 84% | 8- co-ed, public, community = 75% |
| 2- all-female, church-related = 83% | 9- <u>AVERAGE</u> , all respondents = 72% |
| 3- all-female schools; combined = 81% | 10- co-ed schools; combined = 71% |
| 4- enrollments 500/750 = 78% | 11- enrollments; over 1000 = 70% |
| 5- all-female, independent, private = 78% | 12- enrollments; 250/500 = 69% |
| 6- co-ed, independent, private = 77% | 13- co-ed; private; church-related = 60% |
| 7- Harcum Junior College = 76% | 14- enrollments; 750/1000 = 59% |

Among the private sector two-year colleges, only the "Co-ed, church-related" had a dropout rate higher than the average for all types, combined. All other private sector types of schools had dropout rates lower than the combined average, evidencing a student body stability consistently higher than the public sector community colleges. Unquestionably a host of reasons would 'explain' this consistent difference, and probably the open admission policy of public sector schools which has permitted the academically weak and unsuited student to enroll, (only to end up as a dropout statistic), has materially affected the community college dropout rate.

In the early 1970s, (Blai; 1972, p.17) , a published study notes:

"the following tendencies and characteristics (no particular order) appear to 'profile' the college non-persister, as contrasted with the persister:

- 1- employed more time outside school
- 2- more are enrolled part-time
- 3- attend more schools prior to 10th. grade
- 4- attend private, church-related and co-ed schools more often than other types of junior colleges.
- 5- lower high school GPA.
- 6- lack proximity to college
- 7- seek transfer to 4-year colleges
- 8- find school calibre not as high as expected
- 9- desired subjects not in curriculum
- 10- experience academic difficulties
- 11- lack of goals or college-oriented interests

- | | |
|---|--|
| 12- 'general' dissatisfaction | 22- want time to reconsider interests & goals |
| 13- marriage | 23- changed career plans |
| 14- lack of interest in subjects | 24- have lower socioeconomic backgrounds |
| 15- lack of open-minded, autonomous, and flexible disposition | 25- have lower initial educational aspirations |
| 16- fewer parents urge college attendance | 26- smoke cigarettes |
| 17- financial pressures | 27- being female |
| 18- lower normative congruence | 28- turning in paper or theme late |
| 19- lower friendship support | 29- having no religious preference |
| 20- lower social integration | 30- health problems |
| 21- lesser institutional commitment | 31- family problems |

As Astin (1977) has noted, with reference to the advanced-standing transfer of two-year college students;

"....even after controlling for the student's social background, ability and motivation at college-entrance, the chances of persisting to the baccalaureate degree are substantially reduced." (p.234)

And as Cohen & Brawer (1982) comment; in reference to Astin's findings:

"His finding that residence on campus; a high degree of interaction with the peer group; the presence of good students on campus; and full-time student status, (in concert), lead to attainment of degree, (i.e. baccalaureate), is useful in describing the factors relating to both individuals and institutions that interact to yield success as measured by degree attainment." (p.55)

Their cogent comment concludes the critical characteristic in college clientele dropouts is:

"data on students' ethnicity, prior academic achievement, and degree of aspiration pale in comparison with the essential component; degree of their personal commitment." (underlining supplied) (Cohen & Brawer: 1982, p.56)

Harold Nicolson's pithy comment supportively encapsulates their conclusion: "Effort appears to be the main art of living". Or - as Dean Boris Blai, Sr. was wont to say; "Genius is one-tenth inspiration and nine-tenths perspiration"!

COLLEGE EVALUATIONS

In general - what are the quality assessments of two-year colleges by their student clienteles? Comparing the results of a survey among Harcum Junior College students with those of students at a co-educational public, community college in the neighboring state of New Jersey, (Blai: 1972); larger percentages of the

community college students expressed satisfaction regarding 6 of the 10 questionnaire items than did the private college respondents at Harcum. For example - 34% expressed the belief that student activities fees were being spent to support a meaningful activities program; only 14% so indicated for the private college group. In contrast, however, 34% of the Harcum respondents expressed the belief that they effectively participated in college governance, whereas only 16% so indicated at the public, community college. Regarding these two areas, (i.e., student activities and college governance), both groups expressed substantially less satisfaction than with regard to the other areas of inquiry which related to different dimensions of campus life.

Specific responses of both groups regarding college governance included:

- 1- only a minority were favorably disposed to existing governance practices.
- 2- less than 25% of the private college respondents, and only 31% of the public college students felt they had a voice in policy decisions affecting them.
- 3- less than half of the entire respondent population felt that they had a good understanding of the existing plan of governance.
- 4- between 66% and 75% believed that a small group of individuals tends to 'run' the institution.
- 5- only 15% of the Harcum group, and 21% of the community college clientele expressed confidence in the existing plan of governance.

With reference to existing academic programs:

- 1- Substantial numbers reported:
 - a- their courses relevant to their needs.
 - b- well taught.
 - c- reasonably scheduled.
 - d- valuable learning experiences.
- 2- Substantial majorities of both groups held favorable opinions regarding their academic programs.
- 3- Overall, they indicated that they:
 - a- were achieving their educational objectives.
 - b- felt free to consult their instructors.
 - c- found their instructors almost always available for consultation.
 - d- found their instructors offered clear learning objectives.

All in all - across six principal dimensions of college programs, activities, and services, a clear similarity was evident in the responses of both groups regarding:

- 1- academic program and faculty. Both samples rated these very highly.

- 2- college governance and student activities received fewest votes of confidence.
- 3- library and student development functions fell into the middle range of descriptive assessment adjectives offered.

Despite such demographic differences as an all-female group versus a co-educational group; an essentially residential college versus a commuter, day student population - there were far more similarities than dissimilarities in the satisfaction levels expressed.

In the dimension of educational goals and collateral college-related values, what are the views of public and private two-year college students? Parallel surveys of students at Harrisburg Community College; first community college in Pennsylvania authorized to award associate degrees, (70% male; 72% at least 21 years old; 74% part-time students), and Harcum Junior College, first private two-year college in Pennsylvania authorized to award the associate degree, (100% female; 100 % younger than 21 years of age; 100% full-time students), reveals interesting contrasts and similarities.

1- Educational level of Harrisburg students' parents was quite similar to that found in other community colleges; below that found among the students in four-year colleges/universities. (Snyder, 1969)

2- Harcum students' parents were consistently higher; more nearly approximating that found among parents of four-year college students; 6 times as many mothers had earned baccalaureate or graduate level degrees than did the mothers of the Harrisburg student sample - and 5 times as many fathers had earned such degrees.

3- Among 9 pre-selected educational goals, with only two exceptions, at least 50% of both student clienteles identified themselves with the same goals:

- a- obtaining vocational or professional training.
- b- becoming a cultured person.
- c- developing one's personality.
- d- developing thinking ability.
- e- developing a satisfying life philosophy.
- f- developing moral standards.

- g- learning how to enjoy/appreciate life.
- h- earning a higher income.
- i- making a desirable marriage.

A FINAL WORD

Helping to prepare students to assume their multiple and varied roles in today's highly complex world is the common thread linking the public and private two-year colleges. Both types recognize that contemporary young Americans must fulfill these many roles if they are to cope effectively with the expected responsibilities and obligations virtually all will assume throughout the course of their lives. Despite some differences in background and family orientation, both types of schools enroll many students holding similar values and views. Both public and private two-year colleges must take into account student attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values if they are to address themselves to their purposes effectively.

Over the years, the social role of the two-year college has been vigorously, and at times vehemently debated. Unfortunately, these semantic 'battles' have often generated more heat than light! The junior/community college, whether public or private - despite all the intense wishful thinking that has taken place - cannot be 'all things to all people'. Educational success simply cannot be assured - despite its egalitarian appeal! Perhaps educational opportunity can be - particularly if the prospective students will make the necessary, sustained effort to become 'better educated'. In any event - to the extent that two-year colleges receive both the financial backing and enthused support of their numerous constituencies, they can - and do - perform a variety of valuable educational functions.

Finally, then - what is a realistic social goal for the two-year college in the United States? As the most rapidly growing segment of higher education, they:

".... can make a real contribution to social justice only by effectively educating properly prepared, able, and motivated individuals from all classes and groups. Higher education appears to have been primarily a channel of

individual mobility. It can provide equal opportunities to all, and it may be able to help the disadvantaged to overcome inherited educational disabilities. But it cannot ensure the equal distribution of educational success among classes or other politically active groups." (Ben-David: 1977, pp 158-159)

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1982

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Being ignorant is not so much a shame,
as being unwilling to learn.

-- Ben Franklin

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